DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE SUBJECT: U.S. NAVY MARITIME STRATEGY BRIEFER: VICE ADMIRAL JOHN MORGAN, DEPUTY CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS FOR INFORMATION, PLANNING AND STRATEGY MODERATOR: CHARLES "JACK" HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE PUBLIC AFFAIRS TIME: 5:30 P.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 2008

MR. HOLT: Vice Admiral Morgan, the deputy chief of naval operations, welcome to the Bloggers' Roundtable this afternoon. We're ready when you are, sir. Do you have an opening statement?

ADM. MORGAN: Jack, I'm all set. Thanks for setting this up. I appreciate this, and it's probably an area that I've not paid sufficient attention to. We happen to be here in Denver. We've just had a very successful conversation with the country, probably -- I don't have the exact figures in front of me, but I think the largest participation to date. Very spirited conversation. We were joined by Admiral Gary Roughead, the chief of naval operations. He in fact extended his stay for a few minutes because of the nature of the questions that were being asked. You could tell that he was stimulated. So I think we've had a good day today and I look forward to the session with all of you.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

If we're ready, then we will begin the questions. And Gavrain (sp), you were first on line, so why don't you get us started?

Q Good afternoon, Admiral. My question has to do with the humanitarian assistance and disaster response aspect of the strategy that's featured as part of the six capabilities the Navy intends to execute.

Observing the proactive deployments of the gray and white hulls -- and I'm talking about sending the Comfort and the Mercy and sending the Peleliu, sending the Boxer to South America this summer. Some people are calling this Navy medical diplomacy.

And I'm curious how the Navy intends to measure results -- or measure a return on investment for this capability as it executes this part of the strategy.

ADM. MORGAN: I appreciate the question, and you're right. Over the course of the last couple of years, we've emphasized this contribution that we make. You know, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief has been a part of the Navy missions probably since the start of the Navy.

What's different now and what's changing now is that we are now expanding our efforts to train for these kind of missions and equip for them as well, but we're also dedicating time now to proactively schedule these types of missions.

We're looking ahead at a two-year window to schedule when the next hospital ship should deploy. The creative use of different types of ships, such as amphibious ships like we have off the coast of Western Africa right now. We're actively reaching out to a number of organizations beyond the military. We're dealing very closely with the State Department, we're dealing in the interagency now, and we're dealing with nongovernmental organizations that a few years ago would probably not have participated in these types of missions.

So it really is a bit of a different approach to what really has been an enduring mission.

Q I'm just curious; how are you going to measure your return on investment, though, because you're spending resources and ships and that type of -- I mean, the Navy's putting their foot forward on this. And I'm just wondering what empirical data do you measure success?

I mean, conventional wisdom says this is a great idea, and I subscribe to that conventional wisdom. I'm just curious how do you say, on the PowerPoint or on a piece of paper this is what we did and this is what we wanted -- this is what we accomplished?

ADM. MORGAN: Right. That's a good point. In fact, we're going to considerable lengths to measure those things. I don't have the facts and figures here, but I have them in my office back in the Pentagon. But we can tell you precisely how many patients we've seen when the hospital ships have visited -- (audio interference) -- countries.

So we can give you all those facts and metrics that show you how many patients we saw, how many pairs of glasses we dispensed, how many surgeries we conducted, how much dental appointments we did. But there's a bigger part of your question, I think.

And one of the ways we've tried to gauge the return on investment here is using metrics that are generated outside the Navy. For example, Pew Research has done some very careful analysis of what kind of impact these types of missions are having. I think if you go to Pew Research -- and once again I don't have the fact and figure in front of me -- but you'll see they're trying to measure what kind of influence these types of visits have had in Indonesia, for example -- the largest Muslim country in the world, where the image of Americans was far lower before the visits of our hospital ships and much improved once our hospital ships had been there.

We don't know what all that means. We certainly have to look at those types of metrics over time to assess the longer-term results, but every metric that we've seen so far is a positive indication of the impact that we're having and also a positive indication for our return on investment, and that's what's caused us to believe we now can program and budget for the proactive use of these types of assets.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Steeljaw Scribe.

Q Good afternoon, sir. First off, I'd like to thank you very much for taking the time out of your schedule to talk with us, in this new type of forum.

One thing, sir. There's some quite extraordinary statements that have been made in the maritime strategy that have sort of been overshadowed in the ongoing resourcing and force structure debate.

One in particular deals with deterrence. In the maritime strategy it states, quote, "Will pursue an approach to deterrence that includes a credible and scalable ability to retaliate against aggressors conventionally, unconventionally, and with nuclear forces." And this was also in the larger construct of preventing wars.

I'm curious how, within such an imperative, you see a conventionally armed maritime force acting in a deterrent, dissuasive role in a confrontation between two regional nuclear actors -- say, India-Pakistan or India-China. ADM. MORGAN: Obviously a complex question. And one of the things that we were stressing is an area that I personally have seen little academic work, and that is the notion of escalation control. I think that speaks to your example of how do you deter confrontation between two nuclear-capable countries, India and Pakistan.

I worry personally that the issue -- that the subject matter of escalation control has not been adequately studied academically for probably the last 15 years or so. It used to be a subject of great study during the Cold War, and I worry to some extent that we have coasted along in momentum of what deterrence theory and escalation control was in the Cold War, and I think the world has fundamentally changed since then.

I have encouraged academics from around the country and the world, indeed, to give new consideration to the very question that you raise. What is our approach to escalation control, particularly when there are countries with nuclear weapons at their disposal?

Q Yes, sir. And that's why, as we look at some of the new capabilities that our forces bring to the front -- for example, when we look at the antiballistic missile capabilities that we could bring to a potential conflict, it raises some real issues to this issue of escalation control.

ADM. MORGAN: It certainly does. And the issue is a complex one. And I don't think an oversimplified answer will suffice.

But you're right. There are new capabilities emerging, and missile defense is certainly one. Cyberspace is clearly an emerging warfare area. And so -- and how all that plays into escalation control is why I think we really need to do some very thoughtful study, academic research, war-gaming, planning. And I can tell you that I spend a considerable amount of my personal time thinking and dealing in this subject.

Q Thank you, sir.

ADM. MORGAN: Great question.

MR. HOLT: Okay. David.

Q Hi. This is David Axe from War is Boring. Hey, I think the maritime strategy is great and it's -- encouraging to see the Navy thinking about these things and coming up with a pretty reasonable answer to the Navy's place in the world today.

But what I think we haven't seen is a connection between the strategy and acquisitions. In other words, okay, you've got a great strategy, but what kind of ships do you need to make it happen? And in light of the sort of turmoil in Navy shipbuilding, it looks like the Navy hasn't quite answered that question.

Can you tell me is there somewhere a coherent plan to pull off this strategy with shipbuilding, or to use shipbuilding to help execute this strategy that we're just not seeing?

ADM. MORGAN: Is it David, is that correct?

Q David, yeah.

ADM. MORGAN: Yeah, David, great point. There are some things that you're not seeing that I'll be happy to discuss. And one of the central notions that motivated us to write this strategy in the first place was this: We said simply every budget is a strategy, and if you agree with that notion, then we argued that if that's true, then you ought to give some strategic thinking to your budget. And what that has led us to is a new process in the Navy, and the process is this, and it's part of what you're not seeing.

We wanted to make sure that we could articulate strategically where we think the Navy should be, along with the Coast Guard and the Marine Corps in the future. So we wanted to have that coherent, strategic story first.

Then the question that you're really getting at, David, is well, how does the strategy inform our budget? And there's a document that you're not seeing, and that document is a classified document. I can't tell you the content of it, but I can tell you what it tries to address, and that document is called the Navy Strategic Plan.

And what the Navy Strategic Plan does, it takes the strategic imperatives from the maritime strategy and translates it into risk guidance that's issued to the folks who build our budget and program our budget on the front end of the cycle. And then we're going to gear that and synchronize that with the general DOD budget so every two years I don' think you're going to see a new maritime strategy issued every two years, but what you will see is a Navy Strategic Plan that is issued every two years in synchronization with the development of the Department of Defense budget.

So that's how we intend to make it coherent. David, the phrase that I use is all right, we started that every budget is a strategy. We want the strategy to inform the budget. Our challenge to the coherency issue that you raised is we now have to make the poem rhyme.

And we're beginning to see that already. We're beginning to see where we say this strategic imperative is important; we write the risk guidance -- it's based upon war gaming, intelligence assessments, considerations of what other services are doing, and say we can accept more risk here or less risk there, and then that document then is really translated into our budget.

So that's the process that we have in the works. We're seeing some evidence it's already working. We're seeing where we've issued risk guidance and yes, we can match that to where the Army and the Air Force are investing their dollars. And so we think this will be more synchronized, more integrated and more synergistic approach to the budget responsibilities that you talked about.

Q Can I follow up real quick?

ADM. MORGAN: Sure, go ahead.

Q Let's approach the strategy starting from the shipbuilding plan then. Shipbuilding's a mess. I mean, LCS has effectively fallen apart, right? And depending on who you ask, the DDG-1000 is costing up to 5 billion (dollars) apiece. And so light of the shambles that is shipbuilding, can you pull off this maritime strategy in 15, 20 years?

ADM. MORGAN: Well, David, time will tell. I'm not the best guy to talk to about the acquisition stuff. It is a complex field. Perhaps I have the easier job, and that is to think about strategically where we think we need to be.

But then that's a debate I think we have to have in front of the American people. Let's talk about that. Let's see what we have to do.

And the bigger role that I think is at the core of your concern, and it's a rightful concern, is what role is sea power going to play in America's future? I mean, it's been at the heart of our rich history and it's gotten us where we are, along with a lot of other things today in our position in the world. But what role is sea power going to play in a global system that is so dependent upon commerce that flows across the sea?

Ninety percent of that commerce comes -- flows across the sea, 80 percent of the world's population lives within 200 miles of the coast and 70 percent of the Earth's surface is ocean.

But the core that you keep coming back to is how are you going to build the types of ships and the systems and the people that you need in order to implement the strategy? I think the jury is out. I think time will tell and we'd better roll up our sleeves.

Q Okay. Thanks.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Greg Grant.

Q Hey, Admiral. I wanted to ask how do you respond to critics who say that the Navy is simply shrinking too small to perform the missions, some of which you just mentioned -- sea-lane protection and all. One writer said the Navy's unilaterally disarming, especially relative to other great powers out there.

What's your response as far as the size of the fleet and how that fits in the strategy?

ADM. MORGAN: I think the size of the fleet is too small. I think the head of the Navy, Admiral Gary Roughead, has called for a larger Navy. He and his predecessor did, as well -- Admiral Mullen, who's now the chairman.

We have publicly stated that we think to meet our requirements that we need a minimum, a floor, of 313 ships. We're probably dealing with 280 ships today in the Navy; 104 of those ships are deployed around the world and at sea today. I think we will need a larger Navy, and that's the challenge before us in the shipbuilding question. I think we need to make that case in front of the American people and to the American Congress, and that's our responsibility to do so.

But the head of the Navy's clearly said we need to get bigger, not smaller.

Q Sir, what was the total number you said?

ADM. MORGAN: The minimum number of ships we think we need is 313 ships.

Q What would you optimally like to see, to fit the strategy you're putting together?

ADM. MORGAN: Well, I think that number will shift, over time. I think it will depend upon what are the prevailing factors in the world, where are its dangers, what are the environmental concerns? But as we look to the future, we feel in all of our analysis, which is based upon deployment patterns, requirements that are set by the combatant commanders, we certainly do war-gaming. That's why the Navy's strategic plan is classified. But we think that minimum number is 313, and I suspect it'll have to grow beyond that.

Q And what's the minimum number of carrier battle groups you see as acceptable?

ADM. MORGAN: Well, you know, we built the Navy around our carrier battle groups, and some of those aircraft carriers are aging right now, and we're looking at recapitalization studies there.

Once again, I think that the number of any specific type of ship and grouping of ships is going to be predicated on the prevailing and emerging challenges and dangers. So that's all part of our 313-ship analysis, and we'll look beyond that.

Q Thank you.

ADM. MORGAN: Thank you

MR. HOLT: Okay. Eagle One.

Q Admiral? Good afternoon, Admiral.

ADM. MORGAN: Good afternoon.

Q I have a question that relates to the very first task that's identified in the maritime strategy, which is the -- we're talking about global posturing and limit regional conflict with forward-deployed, decisive maritime power. I'm a little fuzzy on the distinction, and I'm concerned that there is going to be fuzziness in other people's minds about that description and what would have been described in the old says as gunboat diplomacy.

Because -- maybe you can help me clarify what the difference is between those. Are we -- how do we stop regional -- or limit regional conflicts?

ADM. MORGAN: Well, I think the first thing that comes to my mind when I look at the strategic comparatives that we've written into the maritime strategy is -- perhaps it's more simply put as forward presence. I think it is an enduring strategic imperative for the United States Navy and certainly the United States Marine Corps is that we be forward present, and that aids us in several different ways.

First of all, it provides a layered defense for the United States. One of the expectations of the American public that we certainly heard here in Denver today, that we've head in every city in which we've gone to, Americans expect three things from us, when we listen to their voice.

They expect us to stay strong; they expect us to protect the homeland and our citizens; and they expect us to help, in cooperation with other partners around the world, to prevent war. And the way we think we can do that, to meet those expectations, is to be a forward- presence.

We do not aspire to be the global policeman. But we certainly want to be a part of that global neighborhood watch, along with others, helping where we can. And certainly we would prefer to prevent war.

We're convinced that the proactive cost of wars is far more expensive (sic) than war itself. So if we can help prevent that war, it benefits everybody in that global system. And for us, we believe -- we fundamentally believe that we have to be forward-presence. So that's the philosophical and strategic notion that I think you're referring to.

Q Yes, sir. If I may follow up for a minute. Some people have looked at the AFRICOM deployment off -- in the Gulf of Guinea and have argued that that is, in itself, gunboat diplomacy. How would you -- and I'm concerned that the congressional -- some in congressional or public audience members will take that view.

How would you respond to that? What's the difference between what we're doing there and what the historic presence in military ships off the coast of another land would be?

ADM. MORGAN: In my mind, it's a clear distinction with respect to the nature of the operation that we're conducting off the west coast of Africa today and gunboat diplomacy. What you're seeing today is the use of an amphibious ship and a very fast vessel to be able to go into the countries along the western coast of Africa. And the way those ships are manned right now is with a group of not only U.S. military folks, principally Navy and submarine corps and others, and some other cooperating navies from around the region, but what you're seeing is a group of non-governmental organizations also sending people with us.

Doctors Without Borders, Operation Smile. You're seeing reconstructive efforts, educational efforts, medical and dental efforts. That's the kind of help that's being provided right now. That distinction between those types of humanitarian services and assistance is far different than gunboat diplomacy. So the distinction, in my mind, is clear.

Q Yes, sir. Thank you very much.

ADM. MORGAN: Thank you

MR. HOLT: Okay, Andrew. Andrew? Still with us? (No audible response.) Okay, well, evidently Andrew must have disconnected. All right.

Let's see, have we got any follow-up questions? We've got just a few minutes left here. Any follow-ups?

Q Sure.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q This is Gavron (sp) again. I have a question on -- the 2006 QDR lists shaping the choices of countries at strategic crossroads as one of its strategic priorities. And it goes not to say the United States will attempt to shape these choices in ways that foster cooperation for mutual security interests.

While the QDR goes on to list a number of countries, it spotlights the choices of major powers that are emerging, like India and Russia and China as key factors for determining the international security environment in the 21st century.

And the maritime strategy discusses great-power war and discusses the concentration of combat power in the Pacific, but I'm just curious why the maritime strategy intentionally did not discuss the challenges of emerging regional powers -- and I'd use the example of China, because it's popular -- because we appear to be approaching a potential -- and I use that word maritime competition -- with them.

ADM. MORGAN: Yeah, we made a fundamental choice. And what we did as we entered the development of a maritime strategy, we took -- we looked at different future scenarios and alternative scenarios. We considered a wide range of potential grand strategies that might emerge in the United States over the course of the next decade or so.

A very quick discussion of those alternative futures that we considered, and I will get to the core of your question, is we looked at the primacist approach that the United States may adopt. We looked at a cooperative security approach. We looked an isolationist approach. The fourth alternative solution, or alternatives there that we considered, was a selective engagement approach. We looked at some unique alternatives, one a coalition of denial, essentially, if the United States went right, everybody else in the world would go left. And another very interesting scenario that we looked at was a concert of power. You can tell by the very name of the strategy that of those six alternative grand strategies that we thought were plausible, we think global security best fit where we think the nations' aspirations are going, and certainly the trends that we see with security forces around the world.

The reason we did not name a specific country or a specific region is we also saw the economic linkage to the maritime strategy and we saw it in terms of this global system that is far more interdependent now, it's linked by finance and commerce, linked by governance, linked by shared -- well, actually spread need for resources around the world. And so we intentionally avoided the naming of a specific country.

But on a regional basis, I have to tell you one of the true tests of strategy is what strategy says no to. And when you consider the maritime strategy, you begin to ask the question what does it say no to, you can see where we did say no to where we're going to deploy some of our concentrated naval power. And you can see where we say no by seeing where we intend to deploy our concentrated regional power, but we're doing that in the Western Pacific and in the Middle East. Because we think that's where the greatest challenge is, perhaps the greatest opportunities exist.

So in a resource-constrained -- maybe as we are, we have to make sure that our strategic placement of forces is right. But that's sort of the rationale why we did not name some specific countries in specific regions around the world.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much. Vice Admiral Morgan with us this afternoon for the Bloggers Roundtable. We're just about out of time here, sir. Do you have any closing thoughts for us?

ADM. MORGAN: Well, when I -- when Commander Serrette (sp) told me that there was this opportunity to meet with bloggers in this forum that's hosted by DOD, I jumped at the chance. I will have to tell you that it's probably an area that I personally have not paid sufficient attention. There are some demands on my time. But the realization that this is very important to me is why I wanted to seek this opportunity.

I probably need to -- just to set the record straight, I probably did not adequately characterize the phrase that I used earlier, and I'd like to put this on the record.

What I meant to say earlier is that the proactive cost of defense is far more affordable than the reactive cost of war. And that's one of the notions behind this elevation of the prevention of war. We know that that's not an either-or choice. We know it's not a choice between soft power or hard power. Our responsibility to the nation is that we have to be prepared for both. But I think this strategy goes a long way to telling a coherent and, hopefully, a compelling story of why sea power is important to the future of our country.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much for joining us today, sir. And we're here for you, so anytime you'd like to come back, just let us know. We'd be more than happy to host you again, sir. Thank you very much for joining us.

ADM. MORGAN: Jack, thank you very much.

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